

I don't recommend "Pakistan: In the Shadow of Jihad and Afghanistan" by Mary Anne Weaver, author of "Portrait of Egypt". It appears to have been hastily written by an opportunist seeking to capitalize on current interest in Pakistan, Jihad and Afghanistan and the alleged success of an earlier book. There is nothing to suggest that Weaver has studied Pakistan's history, culture or language let alone Jihad, Afghanistan, the history of the sub-continent or Islam. She did visit the sub-continent as an English-speaking, American foreign correspondent during the two moments in recent history when Pakistan was on the US foreign policy agenda.

Weaver reminds us that between 1979 when the USSR invaded Afghanistan and 1989 when the USSR collapsed, the US poured hundreds of millions of dollars into Pakistan in so-called aid. The money was channelled through Pakistan to support CIA-supplied arms to the Afghan mujahideen or resistance to the Soviet invasion. This was Washington's largest covert operation since Vietnam. Once the Soviet Union fell, US aid withered faster than fruit in the desert.

Weaver returned to Pakistan after the attack on the World Trade Center. The US needed a staging ground for their assault on Afghanistan and for the invasion of Iraq. In both instances, Pakistan's role was to support American interests while gaining minimal benefit for the long-term betterment of the Pakistani people.

Pakistan has had considerable experience in being an innocent victim. In Weaver's annoyingly fragmented work, she reminds us that Pakistan was a staging ground for colonial battles, nicknamed the Great Game, played between the British Empire and Czarist Russia during the nineteenth century as these two empires fought for territory with little regard for the welfare of the inhabitants.

Weaver explains, that Pakistan was created during the partition of India after World War Two. Pakistan is a patchwork of former Islamic states combined with the Muslim diaspora that had lived throughout Hindu India. Many of Pakistan's new and reluctant partners were formal rivals. Partitioning cleaved states arbitrarily with fragments in two or even three countries. In the case of the Punjab, which is predominantly Sikh not Islamic – a point missed by Weaver – it was divided such that a part is in India and the balance is in Pakistan. Kashmir is still claimed by both India and Pakistan although most Kashmiris would prefer independence.

Like Weaver's book, Pakistan seems hopelessly mired in self-defeating chaos. She explores the tribal rivalries, illegal drug trade, smuggling, corruption, and foreign interest in Pakistan as an access to the oil fields of central Asia. Pakistan has spent much to become a nuclear power and has engaged in three expensively unproductive wars and on-going belligerence with India over Kashmir. Weaver fails to address the gross economic disparity within Pakistan – most of the Pakistani population are underfed, under-educated and under-employed.

I would hazard that the majority of Pakistanis would welcome improvements in land distribution, food supply, clean water, education, health care, and employment opportunities even at the expense of Kashmir being forfeited to India or to Kashmir's independence. I can't imagine many Pakistanis dancing in the street at the news of another war, and further hardship. Weaver's few references to the common people of Pakistan fail to acknowledge their humanity and suffering throughout this miserable tale. Instead, she recounts anecdotes from interviews with various leaders and the minority of well-placed families. She shallowly reports intrigue as various factions seek power and international support for personal gain at the expense of many.